development concept plan
interpretive prospectus

CUNARD

NEW RIVER GORGE

NATIONAL RIVER • WEST VIRGINIA

development concept plan/interpretive prospectus

june 1990

CUNARD

NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL RIVER • WEST VIRGINIA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR / NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This *Development Concept Plan/Interpretive Prospectus* (DCP/IP) for the Cunard area represents another step in the ongoing planning, management, and development process that is making the New River Gorge National River a reality. The planning process began with the preparation of the park's *General Management Plan* (GMP) in 1982, which provided a parkwide overview of resource management strategies and visitor activities. In 1988 the *Park Management and Development Guidelines* were prepared. That document updates the direction established by the GMP, sets the stage for more detailed planning, and establishes the philosophical framework for site-specific decision making. Among the things spelled out in the guidelines are the statements of park purpose, significance, and management objectives listed below:

The **purposes** identified for the national river are as follows:

Conserve and interpret outstanding natural, scenic, and historic values and objects in and around New River Gorge.

Allow resource-based recreation that does not impair resource values.

The following statements summarize the **significance** of resources at the national river:

Size and topographic relief make the gorge an outstanding scenic resource in West Virginia.

New River Gorge provides some of the best white-water boating in the eastern United States.

New River is one of the best warm-water stream fisheries in the state.

New River is believed to be the oldest river on the North American continent, and it illustrates "rejuvenated stream" processes.

The river corridor has resulted in unusual plant and animal diversity.

New River Gorge contains remains of the mining and transportation of "smokeless" coal, which played a major role in America's industrial history.

After identifying the purpose and significance of the resources, the following **management objectives** – which represent goals that park management will work toward – were formulated for New River Gorge National River:

Protect and maintain the natural diversity of plants and animals.

Sustain the warm-water fishery while protecting natural diversity.

Preserve outstanding scenic views in and around the gorge – preserve the predominant natural setting in the gorge from Interstate 64 (I-64) north and the rural pastoral scenery south of I-64.

Encourage visitors to use related interpretive and recreational sites outside the park boundary.

Preserve coal mining, railroading, and other historic resources that best illustrate park significance.

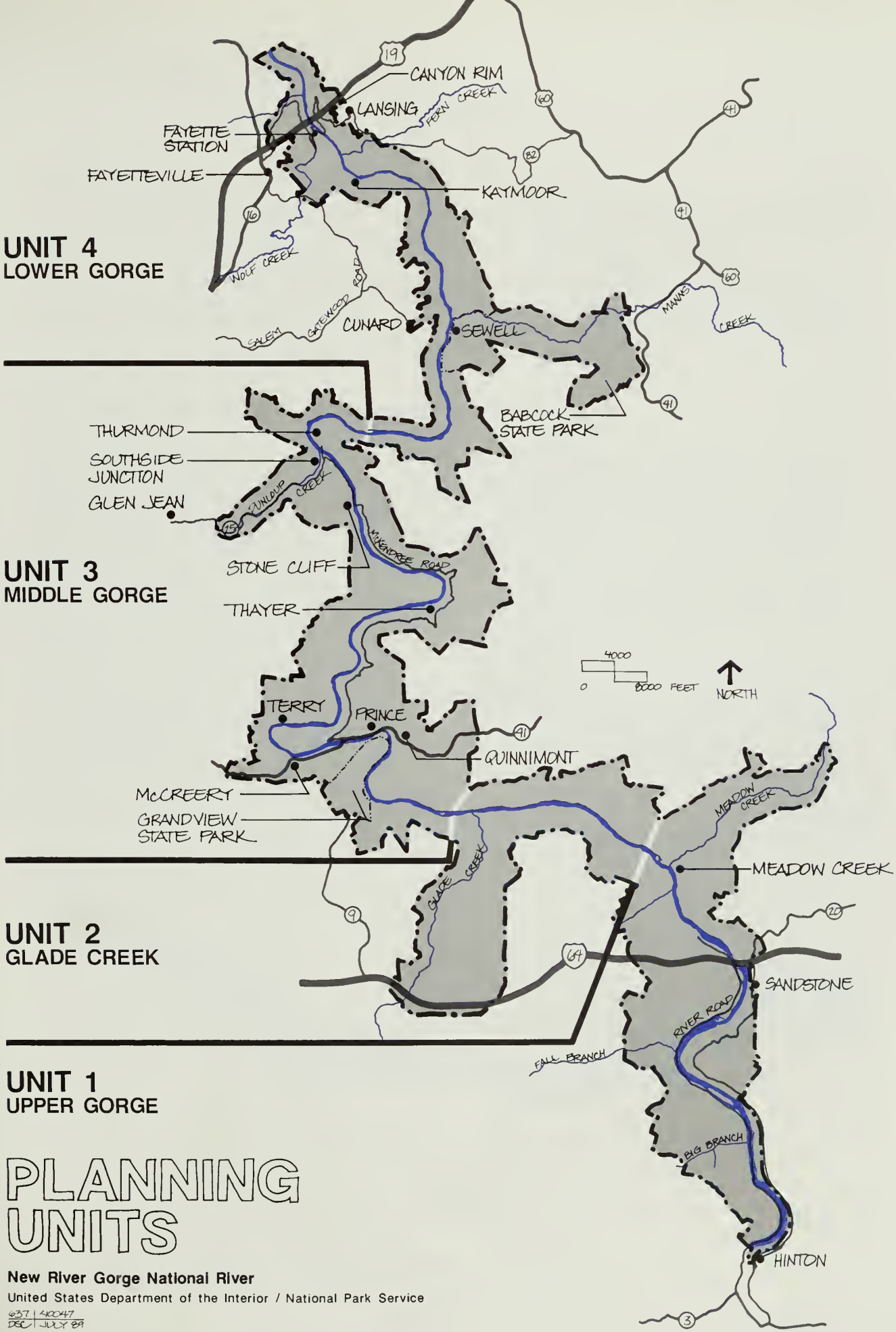
In cooperation with others, achieve and maintain water quality to meet state standards that allow for primary human contact.

Develop a system of land- and water-based recreational opportunities that allow visitors to experience the park's resources to the extent that natural, cultural, and scenic values are not impaired.

Work with local towns and communities associated with New River to help perpetuate their character and vitality.

Work with the community to the extent possible to help them maximize economic benefits related to park development without impairing the natural and cultural resources.

For purposes of the current planning efforts at New River Gorge National River, the park has been divided into planning units. A planning unit is a section of the park that has both physical and visitor use characteristics that differentiate it from other sections of the park. At New River Gorge National River there are four such geographic areas that have been designated as planning units. Moving from south to north (following the flow of the river) those units are Unit 1 - Upper Gorge, Unit 2 - Glade Creek, Unit 3 - Middle Gorge, and Unit 4 - Lower Gorge (see Planning Units map). The emphasis and significance of each unit is explained in the appendix.



PLANNING UNITS

New River Gorge National River

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

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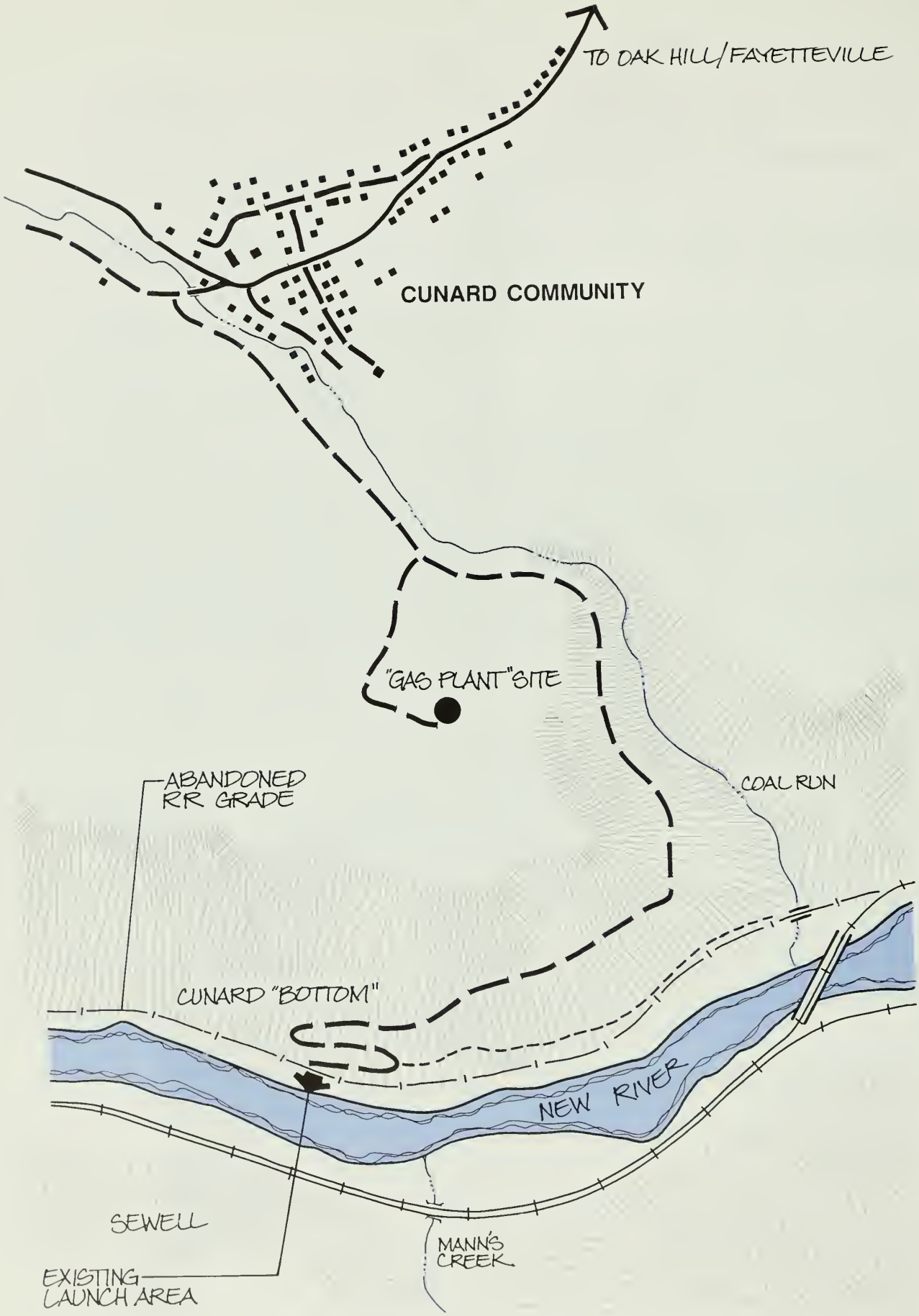

STUDY AREA

CUNARD

New River Gorge National River

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

STUDY AREA

INTRODUCTION

The general area being considered in this DCP/IP is the Lower Gorge planning unit, which is at the north end of the park. This unit is the deepest section of the gorge.

The specific study area is the Cunard site, which is on the west bank of the river in the steep-sided north end of the unit (see Study Area map). The area includes the gravel access road from the town of Cunard to the boat landing sites along the west bank of the New River – from Coal Run south for approximately .5 mile.

PLANNING OBJECTIVES FOR THE LOWER GORGE UNIT

Lower River Gorge is characterized by steep slopes and sheer drop-offs from the escarpment that runs along the rim. The narrow river corridor drops significantly in elevation over a short distance, creating many rapids. No active settlements remain in this unit of the park, although the unit does contain remains of important historic sites at Sewell, Kaymoor, and Nuttallburg. The natural environment has all but reclaimed most of the land within the unit so river runners are the predominant users in this portion of the gorge. Local fishermen and hunters continue to use this area much as they did before the park was established. The rock outcrops along the rim provide dramatic scenic-viewing opportunities for more passive visitors and rock-climbing challenges for the more adventurous visitor. Road access to the river is limited to each end of the unit and at Cunard.

This unit is one of dramatic contrasts in both landscape and visitor experience. On the rim, the emphasis will be to introduce travelers to the New River Gorge. At the other extreme – 1,000 feet below on the river – park users raft or kayak the challenging class V rapids. As a middle ground, opportunities will be offered for relaxed picnicking, taking short hikes on loop trails, attending environmental education programs, or participating in more challenging activities such as rock climbing along the "Endless Wall." Most land-based development and destination activity will be at sites on or near the rim, and the river shoreline will be managed as a more primitive area with fewer modern conveniences. Planning objectives for visitor use, development, and interpretation will be to

provide park information/orientation at Babcock State Park and at Glen Jean as a supplement to the major information/orientation facility at Canyon Rim

provide places to view the New River Gorge – particularly geologic features such as rock outcrops, the river corridor, river rapids and rafting, and historic features

create hiking opportunities within this unit to satisfy a variety of interests and abilities among park users

provide continued access to rock-climbing areas and improved parking for users

establish backcountry campsites along park trails

relieve congestion at river access points

establish interpretation for visitors on the river

establish campsites and discovery trails for river users

PLANNING OBJECTIVES FOR CUNARD

Planning objectives for the specific study area will be to

improve drainage and surface conditions along the entire length of the Cunard access road and to widen for pullouts where possible

reduce vehicle-generated dust at the west (top) end of the access road near the community of Cunard

establish a trailhead parking area for park visitors who wish to hike in this part of the park

provide vehicular access to, or within, 1/2 mile of traditional fishing areas

establish a circulation and parking system at the Cunard river access site that eliminates existing traffic congestion

provide parking space adequate to accommodate 40 commercial vehicles (e.g., flatbed trucks with or without trailers, two-ton trucks, and/or 22 passenger school buses) and a minimum of 10 private automobiles

provide toilet facilities near the Cunard river access site during the primary visitor season

interpret the historical significance of the site as the location of the first ferry crossing in the gorge – part of the "Old State Road" that was completed in 1790

allow controlled access to family cemeteries located in the gorge that are accessible only by the abandoned railroad grade south of the Cunard site

provide information to allow visitors to determine what skills, knowledge, and equipment are needed to participate safely and responsibly in fishing and white-water boating

help perpetuate the character of the community of Cunard

flatwater pool

forest

New River

h

steep slope

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0 10

ATIC

VIEW FAC

SECTION

iver

nterior / National Park Service

flatwater pool | riverbank | NPS launch ramp | abandoned RR grade | parking area | forest

New River | floodplain | steep slope | bench | coal refuse pile | bench | steep slope

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0 10 20 30 FEET

(VIEW FACING SOUTH)

SCHEMATIC CROSS-SECTION

CUNARD

New River Gorge National River

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

OVERVIEW

The study area includes the Cunard access road, which begins near the terminus of West Virginia Highway 9 in the town of Cunard and winds down off the rim for approximately 1-1/2 miles, terminating above the west bank of the New River and the narrow bench between the river and the steep slopes of the gorge.

At the end of the Cunard road are two former railroad grades that create terraces above the river. The lower terrace or bench runs parallel to the river and crosses Coal Run on a wooden trestle before terminating at the active railroad tracks about 1/2 mile north of the Cunard launch site. The upper and lower terraces intersect a few hundred feet south of the launching area, from where it continues south to Thurmond. A small parking area has been constructed on the upper terrace adjacent to the road, and temporary portable toilets have been installed. A path connecting this level to the lower bench has been established by repeated use and has eroded the steep bank creating a trench. Sliding rafts down the long steep bank from the lower bench level to the river has denuded the slope of vegetation, and erosion is severe in some locations, washing away the topsoil and exposing the coal refuse to the elements.

About 1/4 mile north of the existing launching area and south of Coal Run is a flat, 1-acre site adjacent to the river that has excellent potential for a launch site. The site is wooded and covered with large river rocks, deposited by the river during periods of high water.

Class VI, one of the commercial rafting companies, owns property south of the Cunard launch site, which they use for a picnic stop or an occasional put-in for their trips.

Cunard was the site of some historic mining operations associated with the railroad. No utilities are available to Cunard.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Vegetation at Cunard is made up of a hardwood forest consisting of silver maple, red maple, American sycamore, paw paw, river birch, elm, box elder, buckeye, beech, and paulownia. Some of the shrubs are mountain silverbell, musselwood, and spice bush. Other herbaceous plants in the area are nettles, fleabane, wild ginger, wild rose, phlox, and poison ivy.

The New River is free-flowing for 52 miles within the national river boundary. River levels fluctuate over short periods of time because of water releases from Bluestone Dam. The Bluestone Dam is currently operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to maintain a summer pool of 1,410 feet and a winter pool of 1,406 feet elevation. Once the appropriate pool elevation is sustained, the operation of the dam is essentially run-of-river (i.e., inflow equals outflow). Current fluctuations in water releases result from variable releases at Clayton Lake, an upstream hydropower project. Peaking releases from the private reservoir necessitate that Bluestone Dam pass the incoming flow to maintain the designated pool level. The highest monthly river flows are usually in March and the lowest in September.

The New River and its tributaries comprise one of the largest and most significant warm-water stream fisheries in the state. Of the 58 species of fish identified in the New River, six are considered to be endemic – bigmouth chub (*Nocomis platyrhynchus*), New River

shiner (*Notropis scabriceps*), Kanawha minnow (*Phenacobius teretulus*), and finescale saddled darter (*Etheostoma osburni*).

According to available information from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), no federally listed endangered or threatened plant species occur in the study area, nor is there any critical habitat within the study area. The USFWS has identified the area around Cunard as potential bottomland hardwood habitat. This habitat consists of box elder, river birch, silver maple sycamore, and black willow species. These trees and associated herbaceous vegetation are tolerant of wet, moist conditions that are found within wetland and riparian zones.

The large flat area at the base of Coal Run has a healthy representation of native West Virginia flora, particularly floodplain flora. In a survey conducted by the State Department of Natural Resources, a healthy population of mountain bittercress (*Cardamine flagellifera*) was found. This species is listed on the West Virginia State Department of Natural Resources rare species list, which is maintained by the state's Natural Heritage Program. In addition, the black bellied salamander (*Desmognathus quadrimatriculus*), listed on the West Virginia state rare species list, was discovered in Coal Run. Fishermen are known to sometimes use salamanders for bait.

The USFWS lists five endangered/threatened species that are found in New River Gorge: peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), Virginia big-eared bat (*Plecotus townsendii virginianus*), and bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). In addition, there are three species listed under category 2, which signifies that these species are undergoing a review process by the USFWS to determine whether they should be added to the federal list of threatened or endangered species. They are the Eastern small-footed bat (*Myotis subulatus leibii*), southeastern big-eared bat (*Plecotus rafinesquei*), and woodrat (*Neotoma floridana magister*). None of these species has been found in the study area.

On August 13, 1986, the USFWS classified the New River and its associated aquatic, wetland, and riparian habitat as resource category 1, in accordance with its mitigation policy (*Federal Register*, volume 46(15) January 23, 1981). These habitats are of high value for evaluation species and are unique and irreplaceable on a national basis or in the ecoregion section. The mitigation goal for resource category 1 habitats is no loss of existing habitat values. All losses of existing habitat are to be prevented because these one-of-a-kind areas cannot be replaced. Therefore, all alternatives must avoid the placement of fill in the river and riverine wetlands and the disturbance of bottomland hardwoods.

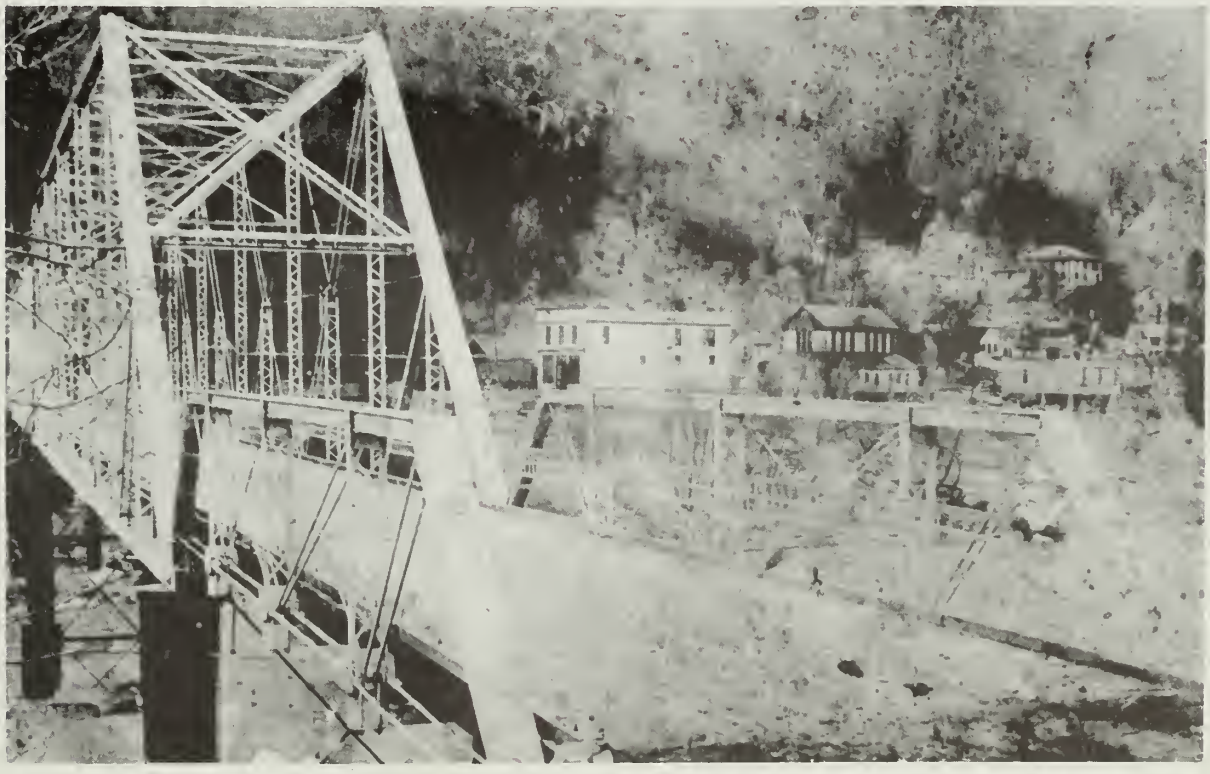
The Cunard launch site is at an elevation of approximately 1,000 feet at the base of some steep slopes (40-65 percent). Soils in the project area are extremely stony silt loams referred to as Ernest-Shelocta; 15-50 percent of the surface is covered with stones and boulders, some of which will require a large dozer to move. The water table is high in this soil type on a seasonal basis. Soil pHs range from 4.5 to 5.5. The project area is on top of a "gob" or coal refuse pile. The depth of this refuse pile was not determined; however, the extent of surface area was mapped by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service (SCS). This soil type is referred to as Itmann soil, and the SCS reported that it is deep and well drained. The color ranges from black to dark grey, and the pHs range from 4.5-6.4. This soil is highly erosive and can be difficult to revegetate because of the low pH, the black color, and high erosion hazard. The one exception is that the Itmann soil in this area has revegetated naturally; however, much of the vegetation in the high use area has been stripped away, causing the Itmann soil to erode and leach into the river. During construction, this bank will either have to be stabilized or other types of mitigation will have to take place to prevent further leaching and soil material from entering the river.

Under NPS guidelines for implementing Executive Order 11988 ("Floodplain Management"), the actions proposed in this document are identified as excepted from floodplain compliance because certain types of actions functionally depend on being located in or near water. The proposal will be designed to minimize impacts on the resource. The proposed parking areas are not expected to have an adverse impact on the area, and are categorically excluded under 516 DM6, appendix 7 (7.4) from compliance with EO 11988.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

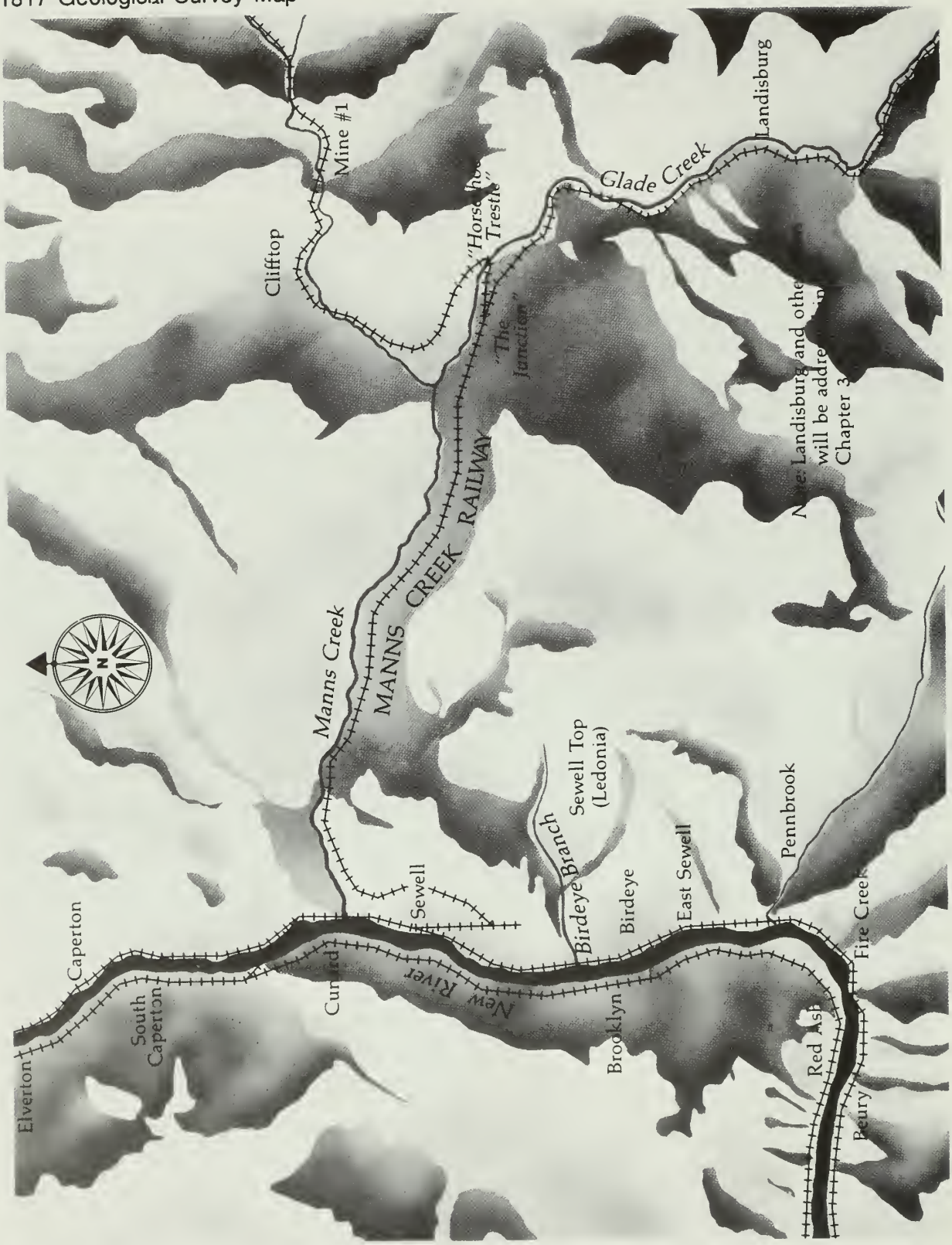
Perhaps the most historically significant fact about the Cunard site is that it is the location of the earliest known ferry crossing in the gorge: "In 1784 George Washington sensed the need for a route to the west that penetrated the great mountain barrier formed by the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains." As a result, the Virginia legislature authorized the construction of a state road to the navigable waters of the Kanawah River in 1785. "Completed in 1790, this passage, which became known as 'Old State Road'. . . wound down into the New River Gorge just south of Mann's Creek, crossing the river by boat (to the Cunard side) before climbing the west slope toward Vandalia (now Fayetteville)." Although the town of Sewell, on the east side of the river, became the first important settlement in the gorge, the Cunard side was too steep to support much of a settlement. The one operation at the Cunard site was a coal camp during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The known remaining cultural resources near the site are traces of mining and railroading activities. Some prehistoric occupation occurred in the vicinity of the development site. Its integrity will be protected by directing use to other locations and by maintaining vegetative cover over the site.



Wagon bridge at Sewell built around 1900
Courtesy of Eastern National Park and Monument Association

1817 Geological Survey Map



Courtesy of Eastern National Park and Monument Association

The Cunard site within the New River Gorge National River has been used historically by fishermen and in later years by private boaters and commercial rafting companies for river access during times of low water.

Aware of the impending demand for use of this strategic site, Congressman Nick J. Rahall II introduced legislation (HR 900) in 1987 that included provisions for improved river access at Cunard. Specifically, section 1114(a) of the bill stated that "the Secretary of the Interior shall expeditiously acquire such lands and undertake such developments and improvements, as may be necessary to provide for commercial and non-commercial access to the river near Cunard. . . ." This legislation was enacted into law on October 26, 1988 (Public Law 100-534).

In response to the intent of the legislation, the National Park Service made interim improvements to the Cunard access road during the summer of 1988, enabling two-wheel-drive vehicles access to the riverbank. Temporary sanitary facilities were also installed, and improvements were made to simplify raft launching by installing a staircase made of railroad ties and adding steel hand rails so that inflated rafts could be slid down to the water's edge. Previously, boaters had been sliding their boats down the steep bank, stripping away the vegetation and creating conditions for erosion to occur.

Because of improvements to the road and launch ramp, use at Cunard has increased significantly. Before the summer of 1988, commercial rafting companies started their trips at Thurmond and only used Cunard during periods of low water in late summer. With the improvement of the road, the commercial outfitters began to use Cunard on a regular basis and discontinued use of Thurmond except for those users who preferred some slow water. The character of the river from Thurmond to Cunard is slow, with only one class III rapid. From Cunard to Fayette Station, the river drops at a steeper gradient, and the rapids are rated up to class V. Commercial rafters would like to use Cunard as a permanent put-in that would enable them to run two trips per day instead of one trip per day by originating upriver at Thurmond.

Increased use at Cunard has also caused loss of vegetation and soil from the existing launch area. The area stripped of vegetation on the launch ramp has at least doubled in size in one season. The loss of vegetation and trampling by people and rafts then cause serious soil loss on the dirt ramp itself. Exposed tree roots are now visible throughout the use area, and in places as much as 5 vertical feet of soil have eroded.

Fishing activity has also increased. Cunard is regularly used by local fishermen throughout the summer and fall. Because many of the fishermen use trotlines, other boaters need to give them wider berth when passing. There is conflict between the two user groups that dates back long before the creation of the national river. Rafters and fishermen make use of the same river eddies that provide calm water for both groups. Because these uses are not compatible within the same eddy, conflict is likely to continue unless both groups make honest attempts to respect each other's needs.

Furthermore, the steep bank conditions at the Cunard site do not make this area suitable for launching and taking out hard boats and dories. The National Park Service will look for an upstream site closer to Brooklyn to accommodate this need.

Ironically, the improvements to the road have temporarily aggravated the conflict by increasing the amount of vehicular traffic without providing adequate circulation space to avoid congestion. Interim improvements were made in the spring of 1989 to help ease this

problem. More permanent and adequate facilities are required to accommodate vehicle circulation, parking for different user groups, unloading and launching boats, and to support basic visitor comfort and sanitation requirements.

Because much of the site is covered by coal refuse, erosion is a constant concern that is exacerbated by the increased amount of use. This plan is needed to propose ways to serve the needs of Cunard's user groups, to minimize the potential for conflict, and to prevent soil erosion at the site. The plan identifies the most effective arrangement of necessary facilities and improvements with the least impact on the natural and cultural resources at the site. Specific design details will be determined during the comprehensive design phase of the project which immediately follows approval of this DCP/IP.

The actions designed to achieve the planning objectives for Cunard (listed on page 6), and to address the specific issues discussed in the previous section are presented below and shown on the Development Concept Plan map. The plan assumes that the privately owned land south of the NPS launch area will remain privately owned. However, should that shoreline parcel be acquired in the future, the site would be improved for additional commercial and public river access and take-out.

This plan varies from each of the five alternatives presented in the September 1989 *Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment.* It is a combination of aspects of several of those alternatives, and also responds to information gathered during the public review of the draft document.

Each comment received from the public review has been carefully considered. Some of the ideas expressed have been incorporated here, including the elimination of the downriver launch area. Others – such as the provision of a concrete launch ramp for hard boats and the development of camping facilities – could not be addressed adequately at this site given the severe space limitations and steepness of the site. The National Park Service will attempt to provide for these user needs at other more suitable locations.

Interpretation at Cunard will be for the purpose of providing just enough information to encourage safe and enjoyable use of this section of the park and to inform visitors of the historical significance of this particular site. The media proposed to accomplish this purpose are wayside panels located at a prepared site in the vicinity of the national park launch area. A tri-panel high profile vertical unit is envisioned that will provide information about (1) river orientation, river etiquette, and safety, (2) the natural history of the lower gorge section of the New River, and (3) the site-specific history of the Cunard/Sewell area.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTIONS

Access Road

Improve drainage and road surface; create pull-outs; pave from Route 9 to top of grade and install guardrails where necessary.

Establish parking area for 10 cars near top of grade.

Cunard Bottom Auto Parking

Improve existing passenger vehicle parking area for at least 10 cars.

Truck and Trailer Parking

Establish pull-through parking for at least 20 vehicles.

Railroad Grade (South)

Improve as access road to Brooklyn fishing site.

Railroad Grade (North)

Improve for vehicle circulation; use existing railroad grade (0.5 mile) and reconstruct 0.3 mile of the abandoned access road to complete the one-way loop back to the Cunard access road.

NPS Launch Ramp

Replace with new facility and repair eroded areas.

New Launch Facilities

Construct three (minimum) raft slides from the bench level to the riverbank and stabilize the shoreline launch sites. (Construction and maintenance of the slides and launch area may require providing an equipment access ramp to the New River shoreline.)

Toilet Facilities

Install permanent toilet facilities with attached changing areas.

Interpretive Waysides

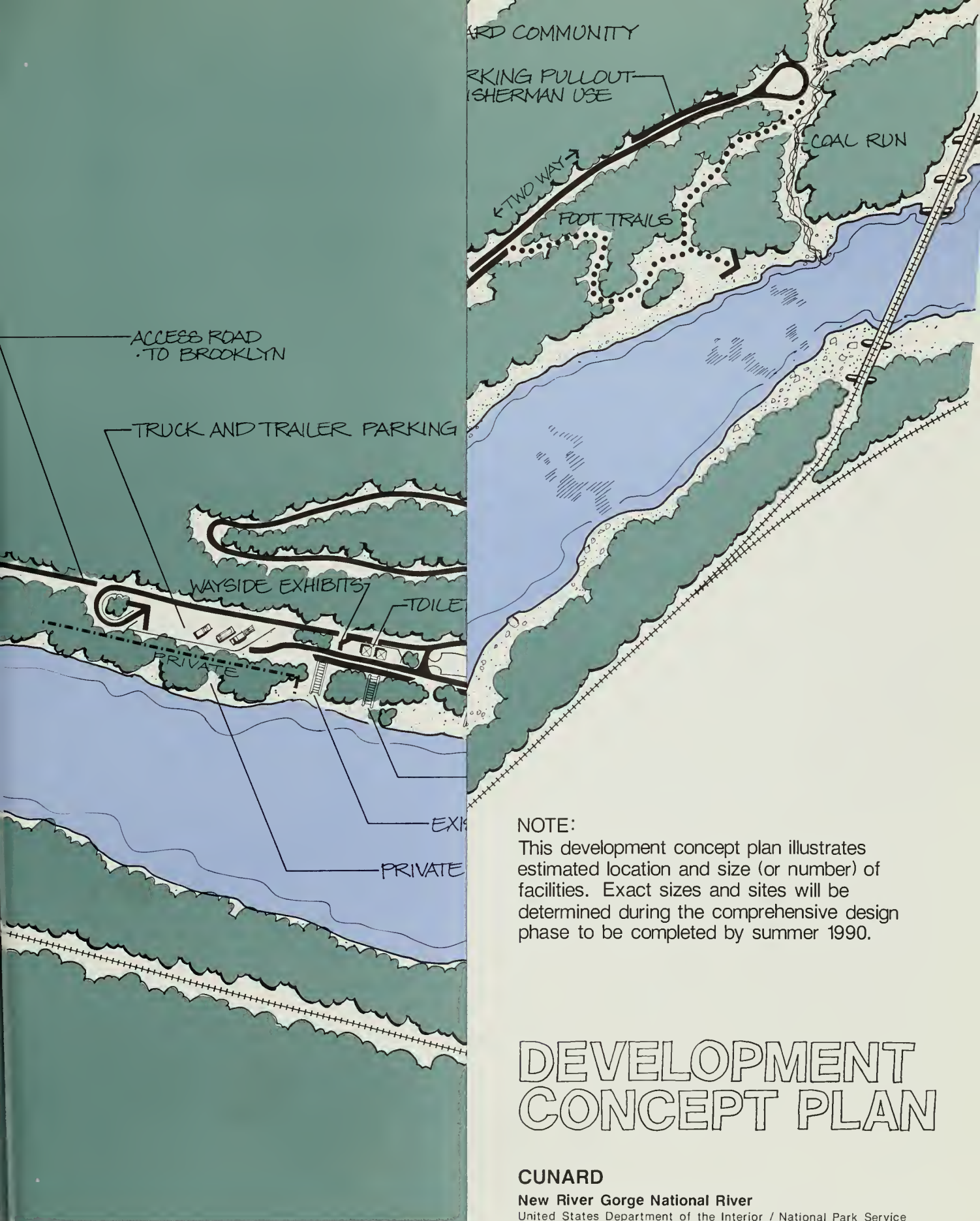
Install interpretive panels near the NPS launch area.

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

The area identified in the new preferred alternative covers approximately the same amount of acreage as identified in alternative 3 (5-6 acres). A rare species survey was conducted in the spring and fall of 1989 and identified a large population of mountain bittercress (*Cardamine flagellifera*). This species is listed as rare by the state of West Virginia. The population of mountain bittercress will not be affected by any of the proposed actions.

The rare species survey also found black-bellied salamander (*Desmognathus quadramaculatus*) living in Coal Run. The state of West Virginia lists this species as G5, which means it is demonstrably secure globally. However, West Virginia is the northern extent of this species range, and the New River gorge may be the northernmost site in the state. Although it is globally secure, the Department of Natural Resources indicated that it is rare or uncommon in West Virginia. Overcollecting for fish bait has likely reduced the population in West Virginia. The state of West Virginia does not have regulations prohibiting this kind of collection. Development of the Cunard site and road to Coal Run could increase impacts on the population. Posting and enforcing existing regulations within New River Gorge National River, which prohibit the collection of live bait, should mitigate potential impacts on the species.

Approximately 600 cubic yards of gravel fill material may be required to prevent erosion along the New River shoreline in areas used for boat launching. Other nonfill stabilization methods may be recommended in the comprehensive design phase. This is in support of the boat launching facilities being developed and which are functionally dependent on being in close proximity to water. This is an excepted action under the NPS guidelines for EO 11988, and therefore no statement of findings will be prepared.



NOTE:
This development concept plan illustrates estimated location and size (or number) of facilities. Exact sizes and sites will be determined during the comprehensive design phase to be completed by summer 1990.

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN

CUNARD

New River Gorge National River

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

TO CUNARD COMMUNITY

PARKING PULLOUT
· FISHERMAN USE

COAL RUN

← TWO WAY

FOOT TRAILS

PARKING PULLOUT
· FISHERMAN USE

GRAVEL ACCESS ROAD
· ONE LANE WITH PULLOUTS

ACCESS ROAD
· TO BROOKLYN

TRUCK AND TRAILER PARKING

PASSENGER VEHICLE
PARKING

← ONE WAY

WAYSIDE EXHIBITS

TOILETS

PRIVATE

ONE WAY →

NEW RIVER

NEW RAFT SLIDES

EXISTING NPS RAFT SLIDE

PRIVATE LAUNCH SITE

MANNS CREEK

CUNARD

→ NORTH

0 100 200 300 FEET

150

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NOTE:
This development concept plan illustrates estimated location and size (or number) of facilities. Exact sizes and sites will be determined during the comprehensive design phase to be completed by summer 1990.

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN

CUNARD

New River Gorge National River

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

Other fish and wildlife species or water quality would not be significantly affected.

The entire project area was assessed in more detail in the *Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment* (September 1989), and no significant impacts were identified.

FUTURE COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS

Consult and file a sediment and erosion control plan with the state of West Virginia Water Resources Division before construction begins.

Consult with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to determine the need for a 404 permit.

Complete an archeological evaluation and testing of areas that will be disturbed before any construction begins. Mitigation as required will be performed.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHERS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

West Virginia Department of Natural Resources
- Division of Wildlife Resources
- Division of Water Resources
- Natural Heritage Program

U.S. Soil Conservation Service

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

West Virginia State Parks

Environmental Protection Agency

Federal Emergency Management Agency

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC REVIEW

During December 1989 the *Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment* was made available for public review and comment. The public response to that opportunity to comment is summarized below:

A total of 12 written responses were received from the following respondents:

CSX Transportation Corporation
State of West Virginia, Division of Culture and History
West Virginia Department of Natural Resources
One West Virginia State Senator
Seven separate commercial river outfitters
Two private citizens

CSX recommends that the park barricade the old railroad bridge over Coal Run to discourage people from accessing the CSX mainline tracks 1/4 mile north of Coal Run.

The state historic preservation officer requests receiving a copy of the archeological investigation report to be completed prior to any construction. The SHPO is also concerned that coal camp remains may be ignored because they were only mentioned in the no action alternative. They also request that the term "comfort station" be clarified – e.g., public toilets.

The West Virginia Department of Natural Resources (WVDNR) is particularly concerned about development occurring within wetlands and/or the riparian areas associated with the New River and its tributaries. Additionally the WVDNR recommends that a task force be formed with the National Park Service to plan, coordinate, and implement water quality, fish, and wildlife management programs within New River Gorge National River. Other specific WVDNR comments have been incorporated into this document.

A commercial dory outfitter requested provision of a boat ramp at Cunard to take out and launch dories and other hard boats.

The adjacent upriver landowner requests that the National Park Service respect his property near the park launch area. He also expressed concern about the possibility of increased camping across the river from Cunard on other property he owns.

The proposed downriver launch area in the preferred alternative was seen as too close to "railroad rapid" for use by commercial (novice) customers and should be eliminated or reserved for experienced boaters only.

More parking space is required than is proposed in the alternatives.

One respondent suggested that more camping and fishing access would be required in the area.

One respondent questioned why it was assumed by this plan that private property in this area would not be acquired given the limited space and therefore planned for accordingly now.

One person asked that the development be screened from view from the river as much as possible.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

During the 30-day public review of the *Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment* (draft DCP/EA) for the Cunard area of New River Gorge National River, both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of West Virginia Department of Natural Resources expressed opposition to the preferred alternative as identified.

The state responded that implementation of the preferred alternative will result in considerable habitat loss and fragmentation for a state-listed rare species, mountain bittercress (*Cardamine flagellifera*). Furthermore, the area identified for support development and fill lies within a potential wetland and certainly within the annual floodplain. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified that the project would require the placement of fill in a regulated wetland (Coal Run) and/or in the ordinary high water area.

In light of the importance of wetland habitats and the state-listed rare species, the National Park Service has developed a new preferred alternative for the Cunard site. This alternative is a combination of alternatives 2 and 3 in the draft DCP/EA.

Construction of boat launching facilities are functionally dependent on being located within close proximity to water and within the floodplain. This action is exempted under NPS guidelines for implementing Executive Order 11988, and therefore no statement of findings will be prepared.

The National Park Service has identified the need for a maintenance/administrative road down to the New River. This road will not be available for public use. This is a change from the DCP/EA. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the state of West Virginia indicate that this is an acceptable action within the scope of the project. The road will be located within the existing launch area identified in the plan and will be designed to minimize cutting of large trees on the slope. A sedimentation plan will be filed with the state of West Virginia prior to construction.

If fill is required for the construction of the boat launching facilities and stabilization of the site to prevent erosion of the New River shoreline, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the state of West Virginia will occur prior to application for permit.

The final plan summarizes the impacts as described in the draft DCP/EA.

Compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, on the approved 1982 *General Management Plan* was initiated in accordance with the September 1981 programmatic memorandum of agreement between the National Park Service, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800. Subsequent consultation with the West Virginia state historic preservation officer and Advisory Council has occurred on changes proposed in the draft DCP and supplement.

The final plan as described in the 1990 *Development Concept Plan/Interpretive Prospectus, Cunard, New River Gorge National River, West Virginia*, does not constitute a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment as defined in section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Protection Act of 1969 (PL 91-190, 83 Stat. 853). Therefore, the National Park Service will not prepare an environmental impact statement for the draft DCP.

James W. Coleman, Jr., Regional Director
Mid-Atlantic Region, National Park Service

APR 13 1990
Date

APPENDIX: DESCRIPTION OF PLANNING UNITS

A planning unit is a section of the park that has both physical and visitor use characteristics that differentiate it from other sections of the park. At New River Gorge National River four such geographic areas/planning units have been designated. Division of the park into units is only for planning purposes. It makes it easier to visualize and comprehend this complex landscape and ensures that decisions about any one site are made in relation to the effects they will have on neighboring sites. Moving from south to north (following the flow of the river), the units are the Upper Gorge unit, the Glade Creek unit, the Middle Gorge unit, and the Lower Gorge unit.

Each of the four planning units has its own unique qualities and significance that differentiate it from the other units. In addition, each unit has been given a management and use emphasis that relates to its uniqueness.

UPPER GORGE UNIT

Significance

This southernmost unit of the park is characterized by an agricultural landscape and flatwater that is punctuated by two scenic waterfalls and the mountain community of Hinton. The excellent warm-water fishery on this part of the river is one of the best in the state. Unusual plant and animal diversity, including at least five species of plants considered rare in the state, and important river-rock riparian habitat are in the Upper Gorge unit.

Emphasis

Because the park is crossed by Interstate 64 in this unit, highway travelers will be introduced to the national river in much the same way that the Canyon Rim contact facility serves visitors on US 19 to the north. More casual river and shoreline recreation such as fishing, floating, picnicking, and environmental education will be emphasized.

GLADE CREEK UNIT

Significance

Glade Creek is the largest tract of relatively undeveloped land within the national river. The restorative powers of nature are clearly demonstrated in this unit, where evidence of former settlement and logging are barely visible.

Emphasis

This unit will be managed to protect its wilderness character. Wildland hiking, fishing, and exploration are the featured uses in this unit. Vehicle access will be limited to trailheads along the edges of the unit.

MIDDLE GORGE UNIT

Significance

The Middle Gorge unit has the greatest variety of accessible natural and historic features and recreational sites. Access is by road and trail corridors that extend the entire length of the unit on opposite sides of the river.

Emphasis

Site-specific interpretation and more contemplative recreation will be emphasized in this unit. Thurmond and McCreery could serve as principal orientation points at either end of the unit – Thurmond focusing on railroading and transportation stories and McCreery addressing recreational opportunities and natural history themes. Improvements at river access points will upgrade facilities to a higher standard.

LOWER GORGE UNIT

The significance and emphasis of this unit are described in the main body of this document.

PLANNING TEAM

DENVER SERVICE CENTER

Dennis Piper, Team Captain, Landscape Architect/Planner
Mary Riddle, Natural Resource Specialist
Linda Romola, Outdoor Recreation Planner/Cultural Resources Specialist

HARPERS FERRY CENTER

Linda Finn, Interpretive Planner

NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL RIVER

Joe Kennedy, Superintendent
Henry Law, Assistant Superintendent
Andy Kardos, Chief of Interpretation
Rick Brown, North District Ranger
Lizzie Watts, North District Interpreter
Leon Clifford, Park Planner (DSC)
Meg Weesner, Natural Resources Specialist

CONSULTANTS

Barrie L. Wolf, Soil Scientist, U.S. Soil Conservation Service
Brian McDonald, West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, Natural Heritage Program

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural and cultural resources. This includes fostering wise use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The department also promotes the goals of the Take Pride in America campaign by encouraging stewardship and citizen responsibility for the public lands and promoting citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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